



# **The New York City Department of Education**



# **Quality Review Report**

**STARS Preparatory Academy**

**Middle School 045**

**2351 1 Avenue  
New York  
NY 10035**

**Principal: Maria Aviles**

**Dates of review: April 7 - 8, 2008**

**Lead Reviewer: Peter Lewis**

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## Part 1: The school context

### Information about the school

The STARS Preparatory Academy is a middle school with 443 students from grade 6 through grade 8. The school population comprises 38% Black, 60% Hispanic, and 2% students of other ethnicities. The student body includes 22% English language learners and 26% special education students. Boys account for 57% of the students enrolled and girls account for 43%. The average attendance rate for the school year 2006 -2007 was 84.7%. The school is in receipt of Title 1 funding with 96% eligibility.

The school has undergone a restructuring over the last two years, and has moved from being three separate grade 7 and 8 junior high school academies, to becoming a middle school with 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students. In managing this change, and its associated developments, the school successfully secured permission to change its name, which is an acronym of 'Striving Together At Reaching Success'.

## Part 2: Overview

### What the school does well

- The principal's vision for the school's development is clearly communicated, and so is well understood and supported by other leaders and staff.
- The good focus on identifying the needs of the lowest performing students has been successful in improving their performance.
- The reorganization of the school into three vertical academies has been very successful in improving relationships, collaboration and learning.
- The school has worked successfully to review and improve the core curriculum which has had a positive impact on the use of data.
- The gathering, generating and analysis of data for individuals and sub-groups is effective in identifying trends, and strengths and weaknesses in learning.
- Staff are fully committed to securing improvement for their students, and readily review their own practice in seeking to secure this.
- The majority of teachers take care to make their lessons interesting, which has a positive impact on students' motivation and engagement.
- Leaders use data analysis and observation well in developing a clear picture of what is working well and where improvement is required.

### What the school needs to improve

- Refine the use of data to set projected targets for students' achievement at the end of each year based on their different starting points.
- Ensure that teachers make consistent use of student goals and interim assessments to plan activities that fully challenge all students.
- Develop the links between rubrics and lesson aims that are specific, easily measurable and which are clearly communicated to all students.
- Further develop cross curricular links so that identified aspects of reading, writing and math are used to drive learning in other subjects.
- Build on the recently established systems that provide a sound base for reviewing the effectiveness of strategic planning.

## Part 3: Main Findings

### Progress made since the last review

The school has made good progress in addressing the issues identified in the previous Quality Review report

### Overall Evaluation

#### **This school is proficient.**

The principal has ensured that the interpretation of a good range of assessment information has been used in supporting teachers well in building an understanding of how much progress their students are making. Because this is comparatively recent, the school knows that there remain inconsistencies in the effectiveness with which teachers make use of data in their planning. The needs of lower performing students are identified accurately; they are well supported and so make good progress. In contrast, higher achieving students generally undertake the same tasks as other students. Consequently, their progress is slowed. The training of lead teachers in understanding the professional teaching standards alongside data development is one example of the way in which the school has established clear strategies to develop this area of its work further. The inquiry team is well focused on the development of comprehension and vocabulary. Good strategies for sharing this work with staff have enhanced teachers' understanding of the use of data. Leaders are skilled and knowledgeable and, as a result, staff value the advice that they provide and demonstrate a good level of commitment to securing improvement for their students.

Students' progress towards their grade goals is monitored carefully, although the fact that these are not set in relation to students' different prior achievements means that interventions, like the goals themselves, are not sufficiently set against an understanding of student potential. This has a particular impact on the progress made by higher achieving students. The school has made good progress in addressing the areas for improvement from the last Quality Review. The transition of the school into grade-based houses has had a positive impact, particularly in re-emphasizing aspects of curriculum review and development and in setting expectations of classroom practice.

### How well the school meets New York City's evaluation criteria

**Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the student's progress over time.**

#### **This area of the school's work is well developed.**

The principal has ensured that a good range of data is gathered and interpreted well. The school's philosophy is that data is a means to "help teachers to help kids". Although the school acknowledges that training has not yet ensured teachers' complete confidence in interpreting and using data, this is increasingly seen in practice because of leaders' good understanding of assessment information.

Leaders in the school compare the progress made by different classes and cohorts of students. As a result, at both classroom and whole school level, appropriate modifications

are made to lesson planning and to programs which have a positive impact on students' performance. Very good use of data has been made in identifying differences in the performance of girls and boys, particularly in the special education group, and through analysis of reading assessments. The school has refined this further in, for example, understanding the strengths as well as weaknesses in the lowest performing students, and in using the information to identify a lack of challenge in some teaching. A good understanding of the performance of special education students, through carefully staged individualized education plans, is being taken further through the school's work to develop its own special education manual to build an even closer understanding of the needs of Tier 1 students across the school.

The school undertakes comparisons with other schools' performance in order to decide whether it is doing well enough. This led, for example, to visits arranged to a very successful middle school to identify features of practice that might be transferred. Training in understanding data has been successful in securing improvement, with some teachers making good use of assessment information in tracking student progress and in setting goals based on their developing performance.

**Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each student's learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school has made good use of its analysis of student performance in identifying gaps in learning and features which may impact on learning, such as the predominance of boys in special education classes. Leaders use data well in identifying the progress made by different groups of students. The principal has ensured that systems and training have been put into place that increasingly enable teachers to plan work from an understanding of strengths and weaknesses in students' learning. The school's interim progress report, although recently developed, enables teachers to set and communicate student goals each quarter. This is further reinforced by the increasingly effective use made by teachers of conferencing records and reading logs and, in math, by strand analysis of State test outcomes. Although the school accurately identifies inconsistencies in teachers' use of interim goal-setting strategies, assistant principals have a good focus on this aspect through monitoring and meeting leadership in their own houses. Because of this, they ensure that goals are set accurately to State requirements at each grade, and that teachers work effectively with their students in setting "small step" goals towards the established targets. Parents acknowledge that they are regularly informed about their children's progress. However, although the school has a good understanding of the variations in students' achievement, it does not yet use this information in setting differentiated goals based on students' earlier performance.

The school is good at identifying the needs of its lowest achieving students, including special education students, and those who are English language learners. Individual education plans are well focused and effective, while teachers make good use of New York testing data in grouping students according to their level of language proficiency. These strategies ensure that students' needs are well understood and that carefully staged interventions are put in place at the right times. The school has developed good plans to implement individual education plans for all students as part of its three-year plan to respond even more proactively to the high proportion of special education students. This reflects the thoughtful way in which all strategic change is planned.

**Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

Since transitioning to three grade-based houses, the school has taken care to review its curriculum to ensure breadth and alignment. Curriculum maps have successfully been used in making sure that the curriculum progresses well from grade 6 through 8 without overlap. Leaders have made good use of these in supporting teachers in their planning, and in ensuring that accountability is well established. Well-focused discussion about planning and assessment in English language arts, for example, has begun to have a positive impact on students’ progress, particularly at grade 6. The school has carefully staged its strategic planning, so that these developments are well resourced. The introduction of technology labs on each grade support research-based learning well, while the acquisition of good quality phonics resources has increased the emphasis placed on reading development. Through these developments, as well as the introduction of stronger assessment procedures, the school is making progress in changing teachers’ focus from, as the principal says, “teaching to learning”. As a result, the best use of recently introduced rubrics and assessment practice demonstrates a good understanding of where students are successful, and why. Leaders have a good understanding of the impact of developments at classroom level. They make good use of information gathered from data and from observations in deciding where to focus their work in, for example, building teachers’ understanding of differentiation strategies or of using rubrics to inform assessment. In both these areas, good use is made of established best practice to establish and model high expectations of practice.

The school has a strong and effective senior team. Their knowledge of the curriculum and of good classroom practice is respected by staff who, as a result, are receptive to change. Through the introduction of the three new academies, good relationships have successfully created an enhanced atmosphere of trust between adults and between adults and students. This is having a positive impact on the school’s development and on student learning.

**Quality Statement 4 - Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

**This area of the school’s work is well developed.**

Systems and procedures to support the school’s organization and its development are well established. Through regular observations of lessons, discussions with staff and students, and the analysis of data, the principal and other school leaders have established a good understanding of what is working well and of where improvement is required. Good use is made of this information in planning professional development that is reinforced well in grade and subject meetings by assistant principals and coaches. Lesson observations focus well on the Professional Standards for Teachers, with the school’s lead teachers included in training. As a result, there is a rapidly developing awareness of classroom expectations that are linked to students’ learning. Staff and students hold the principal in high regard, not least because she has established a good range of organizational systems that allow the school to function smoothly. A good example of this is the degree to which the careful appointment of staff to key positions, and the considered way in which the principal has delegated tasks, has enabled her and the assistant principals to balance their time more effectively between administrative and management roles.

The school's development is strongly focused on developing teachers' skills in planning lessons based on a good understanding of assessment data. This initiative is showing considerable success, although the school acknowledges that more remains to be done to ensure consistency. In continuing this focus, the school makes good use of existing staff expertise in modelling expectations and in demonstrating expected practice. At the same time, the expertise of outside agencies is well used in developing the curriculum, pedagogy and students' personal development.

**Quality Statement 5 - Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student's progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

**This area of the school's work is proficient.**

The school is now making effective use of data in identifying goals for student achievement that are based on the expectations for each grade. A good range of opportunities has recently been established by which staff at different levels review student progress and devise interventions to modify plans should the need arise. Alongside the developing use of interim testing, conferencing and running records, counselors and intervention teachers provide bi-weekly updates of student learning and attitudes to class teachers. These features have been put in place in order to strengthen the degree to which teachers are able to monitor student progress and plan lessons that capitalize on strengths in learning and address any weaknesses. Regular monitoring by the principal and assistant principals is used to inform data-focused common planning time, which gives leaders a good understanding of the aspects of the school's work that are strong, and those areas which require improvement. The thorough analysis of the impact of the gender-based homerooms established at the end of last year, for example, has led the school to reconsider this strategy.

Goals for strategic change are well-informed by leaders' evaluation of strengths and areas for development across the three academies. The school has developed good routines for evaluating their effectiveness and this supports the identification of how whole school goals are being met. The pace of change has been rapid, particularly since the transition to three academies, which demonstrates the increased level of shared vision as well as the school's good capacity for further improvement.

## Part 4: School Quality Criteria Summary

<b>SCHOOL NAME: STARS Preparatory Academy</b>	△	▷	✓	+	◇
<b>Quality Score</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 1 – Gather Data: School leaders and faculty consistently gather and generate data and use it to understand what each student knows and is able to do and to monitor the students progress over time.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty provide . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
1.1 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of each student, classroom, grade level?				X	
1.2 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of special education students?				X	
1.3 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of English language learners?				X	
1.4 an objective, constantly updated understanding of the performance and progress of ethnic groups, gender groups and all other categories of interest to the school?				X	
1.5 a measurement of performance and progress based on the school's own past performance, and among students, classrooms, grades and subject areas?				X	
1.6 a measurement of performance and progress based on comparisons with similar schools?				X	
1.7 training, management systems and structures that support teachers in the use of school data to inform planning and instruction and to track the progress of students?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 1</b>				X	

### Quality Statement 2 – Plan and Set Goals: School leaders and faculty consistently use data to understand each student's next learning steps and to set suitably high goals for accelerating each students learning.

To what extent do school leaders and faculty . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
2.1 engage in collaborative processes to set rigorous, objectively measurable goals for improvement, and to develop plans and timeframes for reaching those goals?			X		
2.2 focus on each student, classroom, grade level, academic subject and group of students whose performance or progress has been identified by the school as a particular focus area?			X		
2.3 identify and improve the performance and progress of those students in greatest need of improvement?				X	
2.4 share whole school goals with all members of the school community to rigorously improve the performance and progress of students?			X		
2.5 convey consistently high expectations to students and their parents/caregivers?			X		
2.6 regularly provide students and their parents/caregivers with information about the goals set for each student, and about each student's progress and performance, and how they can improve?			X		
2.7 invite and enable parents/caregivers to provide useful information to teachers and the school about the learning needs and capacities of their children?			X		
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 2</b>			X		

### Quality Statement 3 – Align Instructional Strategy to Goals: The school aligns its academic work, strategic decisions and resources, and effectively engages students around its plans and goals for accelerating student learning.

To what extent does the school . . .	△	▷	✓	+	◇
3.1 select core curricular approaches that facilitate and provide meaningful interim data about progress towards goals and focus on raising the achievement of students?				X	
3.2 provide a broad and engaging curriculum, including the arts, to enhance learning both within and outside the school day?			X		
3.3 hold teachers accountable for the progress and learning of the students in their charge, for making instruction interesting and compelling, and for creating a positive safe and inclusive learning environment?				X	
3.4 ensure that teachers use school, class and student data to plan for and provide differentiated instruction that meets the specific needs of all the students in their charge?			X		
3.5 make budgeting, staffing and scheduling decisions strategically, based on data, to meet the school's academic goals for all students?				X	
3.6 ensure that there is an environment of mutual trust and respect between all staff and students to support personal and academic development?				X	
3.7 ensure that there are effective and consistently applied procedures to encourage and monitor student attendance and tardiness?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 3</b>				X	

**Quality Statement 4 – Align Capacity Building to Goals: The development of leadership, teachers and other staff capacity is aligned to the school’s collaboratively established goals for accelerating the learning of each student.**

To what extent does the school . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
4.1 use frequent observations of classroom teaching by the principal and other available information to develop a differentiated strategy for improving the quality of each teacher’s instruction?				X	
4.2 make professional development decisions strategically, based on data, to help meet the improvement goals of students and teachers?				X	
4.3 provide frequent opportunities for teachers to observe each other’s classroom instruction and to meet together in teams to plan, share effective practices, and evaluate one another’s instruction in an open and reflective professional environment?				X	
4.4 develop effective procedures for the induction and support of teachers who are new to the profession or the school?				X	
4.5 align youth development, guidance/advising and other student support services around stated academic and personal development goals?				X	
4.6 consistently implement clear procedures that enable the school to run smoothly and encourage effective student learning, and effectively address discipline related incidents?				X	
4.7 create effective partnerships with outside entities that support the academic and personal growth of the students?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 4</b>					X

**Quality Statement 5 – Monitor and Revise: The school has structures for evaluating each student’s progress throughout the year and for flexibly adapting plans and practices to meet its goals for accelerating learning.**

To what extent do . . .	Δ	➤	✓	+	◇
5.1 the school’s plans for improving student outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?			X		
5.2 the school’s plans for improving teacher outcomes include interim goals that are objectively measurable and have suitable time frames for measuring success and making adjustments?				X	
5.3 teachers and faculty use periodic assessments and other diagnostic tools to measure the effectiveness of plans and interventions for individual and groups of students in key areas?			X		
5.4 teachers and faculty use the information generated by periodic assessments and other progress measures and comparisons to revise plans immediately in order to reach stated goals?			X		
5.5 school leaders track the outcomes of periodic assessments and other diagnostic measures and use the results to makes strategic decisions to modify practices to improve student outcomes?			X		
5.6 school leaders and staff use each plan’s interim and final outcomes to drive the next stage of goal setting and improvement planning?			X		
5.7 the principal and school community have a clear vision for the future development of the school and implement procedures and systems to effect change?				X	
<b>Overall score for Quality Statement 5</b>					X

◇	<b>Outstanding</b>
+	<b>Well Developed</b>
✓	<b>Proficient</b>
➤	<b>Underdeveloped with Proficient Features</b>
Δ	<b>Underdeveloped</b>